

CHAPTER 1  
PURPOSE AND NEED

INTRODUCTION

The Pocatello Resource Management Plan (RMP) is being prepared to provide the Bureau of Land Management (BLM), Idaho Falls District Office, with a comprehensive framework for managing 264,481 acres of public land and 648,901 acres of Federal mineral estate over the next 15 years. This part of the document is a Draft Environmental Impact Statement (EIS) which addresses a BLM-preferred and four other RMP alternative. Each of the alternatives reflect key public land issues identified through public participation. The preferred alternative reflects BLM's effort to resolve resource conflicts and assure that the public lands are managed in accordance with the principles of multiple use and sustained yield.

The Pocatello RMP is being prepared under the authority of and in accordance with Sections 201 and 202 of the Federal Land Policy and Management Act of 1976 (Public Law 94-579, FLPMA).

This document also serves as the instrument to satisfy the intent of the 1975 U.S. District Court approved agreement (Case 1983-73) between BLM and the Natural Resources Defense Council, et. al, in which BLM agreed to consider the impacts of various intensities of livestock grazing in its decision making process. Livestock grazing was identified as one of the planning issues. This issue was addressed in the RMP and considered in this EIS.

The Draft EIS is designed and intended to aid Bureau officials in the final selection of an RMP. The EIS further satisfies the intent of the Council on Environmental Quality's (CEQ) regulations for implementing the National Environmental Policy Act of 1969 (NEPA), 40 CFR Part 1500.

TOPICS FOR ANALYSIS IN THIS EIS

In Part I, it was noted that planning issues were developed to help focus the planning effort to ensure that only important issues were dealt with. By the same token, environmental impact analysis topics were developed to focus the impact analysis effort and weed out unimportant topics.

The environmental impact analysis topics came from two primary sources:

1. Public Scoping Activities Since the analysis topics deal with impacts arising from the five RMP alternatives and since these alternatives, in turn, are responses to the planning issues, the analysis topics are an indirect result of scoping meetings held in early 1985.

2. Internal BLM Scoping BLM resource specialists studied the management actions proposed under the five RMP alternatives, determined the resource that would be affected, and then formulated the analysis topics.

The environmental impact analysis topics are given below. Following each topic is a brief discussion of the rationale for its selection.

1. Minerals Management

Issue No. 10: Mineral Development and Issue No. 11: Availability of Lands for Phosphate Leasing - The Pocatello Resource Area (PRA) has a variety of energy and mineral resources. The availability of lands for energy and mineral exploration and development could be affected by seasonal restrictions, No-Surface-Occupancy, withdrawals, and other management restrictions. Restrictions are designated to protect wildlife habitat, recreation values, and cultural resources. These restrictions vary from alternative to alternative and would result in different levels of impact.

2. Lands

Issue No. 1: Land Tenure Adjustments - Requests have been made by the public to identify lands suitable for disposal through sales, exchanges, and applications under the Recreation and Public Purposes Act within the PRA. Those areas have been identified by alternative as well as their possible impacts. Legal access to public lands is lacking. This is Issue No. 2. Under this Issue, 11 areas requiring legal access have been identified. See Issue No. 2.

3. Range Management

Issue No. 3: Range Management - The number of animal unit months (AUMs) authorized for livestock grazing could be affected by proposed stocking levels, range management practices, and land tenure. The various alternatives proposed either increase or decrease the amount of livestock grazing. Management practices involving vegetation manipulation and range improvement projects could increase AUMs available for livestock. Land transfers could take land out of grazing use.

4. Wildlife Management

Issue No. 4: Protection of Wildlife Habitat - Various management actions in the RMP alternatives could impact crucial wildlife habitats. Actions relating to livestock grazing levels, vegetation manipulation, range improvement projects, land tenures, energy and mineral development, forest management, recreation, and wildlife management would have either adverse or beneficial impacts on crucial wildlife habitat.

5. Recreation Management, Off-Road-Vehicle Use, and Visual Resource Management

Issue No. 6: Off-Road-Vehicle Use on Public Lands - Year-round off-road-vehicle (ORV) use in the PRA is a popular local recreation activity. Soil erosion and subsequent siltation of streams may result from ORV use on public lands. ORV designations could have either beneficial or adverse impacts.

Recreation uses and visual quality could be affected by actions proposed under the various alternatives. Timber harvesting and mineral development could adversely affect the availability of recreation opportunities as well as visual quality.

6. Cultural Resource Management

Management actions under the various alternatives arising from either BLM programs on public-initiated requests could affect cultural resources.

7. Forest Management

Issue No. 7: Timber and Firewood Utilization - The PRA has a few small timber sales each year. They usually involve only a few thousand board feet per sale and are usually contracted to local farmers and small logging operations. Efforts to protect recreation and wildlife as well as land tenure adjustments could result in some suitable commercial forest lands and woodlands being unavailable for harvest.

8. Riparian and Water Quality

Issue No. 8: Protection of Riparian Habitat and Water Quality - Livestock grazing is currently having an adverse impact on water quality and riparian areas. Management actions proposed in the Pocatello RMP alternatives dealing with livestock grazing levels, watershed management, and range improvements could have either beneficial or adverse impacts on water quality or riparian areas.

9. Soils and Watershed Management

Various management actions in the Pocatello RMP alternatives could impact soils and watershed. These actions are: livestock grazing levels, vegetation manipulation, range improvements projects, wildlife habitat improvements, and watershed management. Any one of these activities could have either an adverse or beneficial impact to soils and watershed management.

## 10. Economic Conditions

Economic factors are an important part of the human environment in the PRA. Actions associated with land transfers, energy and mineral development, forest management, livestock grazing, and recreation management could all have economic impacts.

Issue No. 9: Shoshone-Bannock Off-Reservation Rights - The present Fort Hall Reservation boundary was established in 1900 by ceded adjustment. However, the Shoshone-Bannock Tribes retained rights to all wood gathering, livestock grazing, hunting, and harvesting on the ceded lands that have remained in public ownership. Therefore, all public lands 16 to 26 miles south of the north Reservation unit are subject to these carryover rights. The exercising of these rights have caused no problems in managing the public lands to date; however, if grazing rights should be exercised, severe adverse economic impacts could occur to some or all of the presently authorized grazers.

## 11. Access

Issue No. 2: Legal and Physical Access to Public Lands - The scattered and isolated nature of some blocks of public land in the resource area provides limited or no public access across private lands. The major need for improved access comes from recreationists (hunting, fishing, ORV users); the forestry and wildlife programs would also benefit from improved access to public lands. Various management actions in the Pocatello RMP alternatives could have an impact on access needs.

### TOPICS NOT ANALYZED IN DETAIL

The following environmental topics were identified but were not selected for detail analysis in this EIS. The reasons for setting each topic aside are discussed below:

#### 1. Impacts to Endangered Species

BLM is aware of the presence of three listed species: peregrine falcon, bald eagle, and whooping crane.

The Idaho Department of Fish and Game and the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service will be consulted prior to implementing projects that may affect habitat for threatened and endangered species. If a "may affect" situation is determined through the BLM environmental assessment process, consultation with the Fish and Wildlife Service will be initiated as required by Section 7 of the Endangered Species Act of 1973, as amended.

This topic was dropped from analysis because any situation which may affect endangered species will be taken care of through the formal consultation process.

## 2. Impacts to Paleontological Resources

The proper management of paleontological resources includes the identification, evaluation, and protection of sites or areas that have paleontological values of significant scientific interest. An inventory of the PRA has identified depositional environments and geologic formations that have potential for important fossil occurrences, but no specific public land sites have been identified.

Standard operating procedures provide adequate protection of these areas in cases where fossil remains are inadvertently encountered during authorized land use actions. It is not possible to assess potential impacts to paleontological resources until site-specific discoveries are made. For these reasons, this topic was dropped from analysis.

## 3. Impacts to Air Quality

The existing air quality of the PRA is typical of undeveloped regions in the western United States; ambient pollution levels are usually near or below the measurable limits. Notable exceptions in the region include high, short-term concentrations of total suspended particulates (related to local winds) and possibly ozone and carbon monoxide, in the towns of Pocatello and Soda Springs.

This topic was dropped from analysis because any situation involving air quality deterioration will be handled by standard operating procedures.

## 4. Impacts of Utility Rights-of-Way on Other Resources

Utility development may be permitted, based on consideration of the following criteria:

- Type of need for the proposed facility.
- Conflicts with other resource values and uses, including potential values and uses.
- Availability of possible alternatives and mitigation measures.

This topic was dropped from analysis because any situation involving utility rights-of-way will be handled by standard BLM policy.

5. Impacts of Grasshoppers and Noxious Weeds on Other Resources

Control of grasshoppers is an important management concern on public land. The BLM will continue to cooperate with the Animal and Plant Health Inspection Service to control grasshopper densities. Whenever grasshopper or Mormon cricket populations exceed 8 per square yard on public land next to croplands, control can be started.

Control of noxious weeds is also a concern. In the PRA, Dyer's woad is the most widespread weed. It infests approximately 1,620 acres of public land. The BLM is presently cooperating in preparing a Noxious Weed EIS supplement which should be completed in early 1987. Individual sites and species will be handled on a case-by-case basis in accordance with the EIS supplement.

6. Designation of Wilderness Study Areas (WSAs)

There are two Wilderness Study Areas (WSAs) in the PRA. They are Petticoat Peak (28-1) with 11,298 acres and Worm Creek (37-77) with 40 acres. The Petticoat Peak WSA has been covered in the Eastern Idaho Plan Amendment/Wilderness EIS. The Worm Creek WSA will be covered under a Section 202 EIS. Although the 11,338 acres are carried in the Pocatello RMP in some activities to balance the acreages, wilderness suitability will not be evaluated in this document. These WSAs will be managed under the BLM - Interim Management Policy for Lands Under Wilderness Review, until Congress makes its decision.